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THE REMOTE RELATION BETWEEN EDUCATION AND BUSINESS.

IN the discussion of business and education we should avoid dogmatizing. Our most unassailable theories on this subject, asserted unconditionally, will be frequently disapproved by obstinate facts. We must also remember the paramount importance of bread-winning for many of our students. Our fine-spun theories on education as a growth, on the expansion of the child-mind, on the development of the imagination, on the cultivation of broad tastes, often have no place in life with stern necessity; our pedagogy is idealized too much. We take too little note of the disadvantages and misfortunes which beset the lives of people; the death of a parent, for example, may ruin the career of a prospective savant or artist. The best we can do is to say that whenever an educational principle is true about business, it is true; and omit the further formulation of laws.

The relation between education and business is close or remote, according to what we mean by "business" and what we mean by "education." If by the latter we mean a short, cheap process like horse-breaking, which fits in a short time for the performance of mechanical duties in offices, stores, and factories, then it deserves no further consideration. Business education is not the training of servants for capital. If we mean by "business" wage-earning and nothing more, then we belittle business. Yet there is a justifiable tendency on the part of capital to degrade, through advertising and machinery, the character of service which it needs. Clerks in department stores find no need of personality, and are not encouraged to build up a clientèle, but instead are expected merely to hand out goods "as advertised." Capital can best protect itself by permitting intelligence and discretion to be exercised for it by the smallest possible number of the faithful and trustworthy. Here there is little relation between education and business. And, generally speaking, education has practically

nothing to do with business, if by "business" we mean only the technical routine of offices, stores, and factories.

Business education, as at present understood, is narrow and limited, preparing for positions in only a small part of the field of business. It includes the study of bookkeeping, commercial arithmetic, shorthand, typewriting, mechanical drawing, shop practice in wood and metal, and possibly commercial German. The objection to this course is that not all intending to enter business will take positions in offices, counting-houses, foundries, and machine shops. And it does not appear that a commercial traveler will sell more goods for having studied bookkeeping rather than Greek, or that a purchasing agent will buy less cheaply or honestly by reason of not having studied shorthand.

Many suppose that business demands of the school definite, expert training in commercial and technical studies, such as have been mentioned above; and little difference does it make to the exacting world if the young minds are incapable of learning all these branches—this special training the school must give, and give rapidly, too. Growth is nothing, manufacture is everything. The school is expected to develop in children a routine skill which will, *ipso facto*, make the three weeks' tyro an efficient automaton or more in the business world. All this is based on a wrong idea that mechanical efficiency is the chief or sole requirement made of one entering upon a mercantile career. The school cannot produce even this machine-like efficiency, not to speak of the needed keenness of judgment. The task is impossible, for contact is not necessarily training.

The other, harder, and more important side of preparation for business is rarely in the public view. It sets before all who intend to earn their livings in business a standard of attainment disagreeable and repulsive even—one in which perfection is impossible, and one in which moderate success is reached only by self-sacrifice, continual exercise of the will, and infinite patience. Further, perfection in this side of business education does not enable the possessor to keep the books or do the correspondence of even a small business. Besides, everybody presupposes the requisite virtues in himself, and is offended if

others do not also discover them in him. But their possessor once known to be quiet, careful, neat, courteous, respectful, attentive, sober-minded, thoughtful, foresighted, busy, prudent, close-mouthed, honest, and of good habits, will have little difficulty in finding employment. One who leaves school with these traits well developed, and also well known to those employing labor, will find that the relation between business and education is not one that needs to cause him any thought or worry.

These traits the school cannot always teach successfully, for the pupils and parents object to having them taught in connection with arithmetic and reading. But the fact remains that the teaching of good conduct, even when it destroys the teacher's popularity or costs him his position, goes deeper than those familiar only with the behavior of children in school would suppose. It is true that pupils most disorderly and inattentive in school become quiet and courteous on gaining employment. They seem to have a sense (or develop it after losing a position or two) that tells them the need of good traits of character in business, and they seem to have mastered the art of conduct perfectly. Yet instruction in it in school would have been better for them and the business which they follow. As between these two requirements, that a student shall have the technical knowledge necessary to do the work of a position, or the qualities of head and heart which he needs to hold that position and gain still higher positions, all know which is more important. The student and his friends insist on technical instruction, seeing nothing else to business education, while employers merrily weed out the ill-mannered and rattle-brained; and the world is satisfied.

This character education, the most practical sort of training for business, continues to be given in other schools, whose purpose is not merely preparation for business; not because that is one of their purposes, but rather because students find in these schools the sort of training that makes them capable of doing what business requires. They find training quite as much in traits as in the technique of business or shopwork. This is perhaps less true of schools offering the traditional course of study than of

those which give training in "real business." Students generally are better pleased with the toy money of accounting than with geometry. It is also true that business education suits the inclination of most pupils better than do those studies which require close application and consecutive thought. Therefore many succeed better in bookkeeping than in algebra or Latin grammar.

Too often the purpose of the old commercial course has been to make office help and salary-earners, such as they were, in the shortest time. The result has been for the most part unsatisfactory, largely, let us say, because the conditions were difficult or even impossible. But the demand for commercial instruction has shown itself permanent, and schools now seek to meet it on a rational basis, that students may get from the studies all the educational benefits in them. Schools now seek to embody in their commercial studies all the advantages which other studies possess, namely, good equipment, skilful instruction, organization, and continuity. The results are good, though two years' instruction in shorthand or bookkeeping seems excessive. By thus lengthening the course some schools have bravely refused to rob the cradle for the office, the store, the factory. They have recognized that training is the chief, and sometimes the only, good in real education. They thus admit the student's poor ability to acquire. They understand that "acquisition or auxiliary studies" are of comparatively little value in many cases, and that not all material can be shaped to the needs of business, even in a long period of time.

By thus reorganizing their business courses on an educational basis, these schools have placed themselves side by side with the grammar school, the high school, and the college in agreeing that their responsibility to the student is not discharged by merely bringing him into contact with studies. They see the necessity of a training extending over a long period of time. Heretofore business education has ignored this responsibility, and so has not met with that degree of success in education which was its by right. Other schools, from child-garden to college, have accepted this responsibility, and have consequently been

more successful in education. This obligation has been well stated by President Pritchett of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology:^{*} "It is the duty of a school to teach lofty moral purpose; to teach a sympathetic and intelligent understanding of men; to teach clear thinking; to teach a capacity for thorough work." No school can evade these obligations and responsibilities. Any school giving this fourfold training to a student is doing for him all that the world can expect, but he is not yet ready to render any expert service. He is merely prepared to learn some occupation, to pursue "acquisition studies." While it is true that the student is better trained in these four particulars by the old disciplinary studies, there are many good reasons why "acquisition studies" should be pursued with the other and better-organized subjects of the course. One is that a student with leanings toward shorthand, bookkeeping, or mechanical drawing can test his aptitude for these studies, and so determine better whether he can advantageously follow any one of them in his business life. Thus he may be saved disastrous experimenting later. Thus he has a fairer survey of the field of instruction and occupation. While our commercial courses rarely, if ever, develop an accountant or stenographer, they enable many to find out whether they are fitted for these occupations. Again, these business courses, properly conducted, should make leaders, not employees merely able to hold positions. Combined with other instruction, they should develop minds capable of initiative. They should produce a restless commercial ambition by showing the possibilities of business. All this they can best do by broadening the intelligence, rather than narrowing the field of instruction. The above fourfold responsibility is to the head, not merely to the hand; to the human being, not to the human machine; to all the race, not to the employers only.

The success with which education is meeting this fourfold responsibility can well be measured by the criticisms which business men make upon the school product. Some of the strictures are in a measure unjust, but for the most part they are

^{*} Based on a newspaper report.

helpful to education. The sum of most of their criticisms is that the school does not drill enough on the essentials of expression, handwriting, spelling, ability to speak or write clearly and briefly, calculations of all sorts, and whatever other forms the expression of business ideas may take. No matter how skilful a stenographer may be, inability to spell neutralizes that skill; a bookkeeper's skill in calculation must be great, or his accounts will not be accurate, and he will spend hours of his employer's time correcting needless errors; if bill clerks write their invoices in that illegible scrawl so dear to society belles and schoolgirls, "the house" suffers for it. Training in these important branches is within the province of the school, and is its nearest and most imperative duty, neglect of which is more reprehensible than failure to supplant the business college or the trade school. We may object to the present teaching of commercial and trade studies on the following grounds: They are not well taught for the most part, instruction in them being given too much from the standpoint of acquisition rather than of thoroughness and mastery; they lack continuity; they are not broadening; they are not made disciplinary, as they should be; they are not well organized and interrelated; too often they attract students of somewhat inferior intelligence. They are too often taken with a view to skipping the lower steps in business. They are no substitute for "the bottom of the ladder." In the study of them there is too often a lack of concentration, especially if there is no position awaiting the student at the end of the course.

While it is true that a certain degree of business education is acceptable to the world of commerce, the sort and method of training are not well understood. Neither is the capacity and wish of business to train its own servants fully understood. Many large companies employing hundreds of clerks and stenographers prefer to take into their employ, not those who have learned a way to do the required work, but rather those who can be instructed in the peculiar methods of the firm in question. Bluntly stated in the words of Josh Billings, it is the wish of most firms employing office help that their employees "should

not know so much, rather than that they should know so many things that ain't so." The boy who is promoted from the lowest position to the treasurership or presidency of a corporation is superior at all stages of his work to the school-trained expert. Every employer prefers to have help of good general intelligence, unprejudiced by any previous training, and then "break it in" to suit the peculiar needs and requirements of his own office.

In this connection we cannot do better than recall the timely words of President Rhees, in the March number of the *SCHOOL REVIEW*:

Those who welcome every rationally conducted attempt to prepare students in schools for work in offices and factories agree that the technique of any business or trade is to be learned best in the office or factory. Experience there means more for the boy who is seeking employment than commercial courses in school That which is of most worth to students is not their drill in technique, but their grasp of fundamental principles and their knowledge of life and of intellectual processes.

Apparently, therefore, expert training for business or trades is hopeless in school. But some consolation remains in this, that the school is a good place for the harder and more disagreeable, but none the less necessary, training in manners, traits, and self-control. Business is system, organization, discipline, drudgery. A school rationally founded on these is better preparation for business than any other. If a school accustoms its inmates to noiselessness, earnestness of words and purpose, economy of words and steps, continual industry, and proper spirit, it is giving the best training for office or factory, though it may violate some prominent educators' ideas of freedom as flagrantly as does the business world itself. Such a school is an antidote to the poison scattered by men with no class-room responsibility who have sought, under the name of "new education," to foist upon schools a system whose chief merits are that it is a reputation maker for the inventors and that it rejects from education the very corner-stone of business itself. Business is training—at least for the employee—in the virtues; why should not education be the same?

An employee must do as he is told—he must be like McGoggin in Kipling's tale, "obey orders and keep abreast of the files"—

yes, more, for the most part he must know what to do without being told. In the foundry or freight yard there is no sweet-voiced, gentle teacher to stand over him and safely guide him in his every operation, to chide him gently when he is careless or makes a mistake, and to laud him extravagantly over the first signs of a trivial success. Our schools are too free from drudgery and pupils are trained, not to burdensome memory work or weary repetition, but rather to the play idea. Much of their work is turned into play for them that they may perform it without knowing that they are working, just as bitter medicines are sugar-coated that the patient may swallow them without the slightest discomfort. But there is no way in which the book-keeper can sugar-coat for himself the addition of a column of figures, or by which the salesman can avoid the bitterness of the insult heaped upon him by some discourteous buyer. Education should be, partly at least, in the experiences of this world, not of the next.

Last of all it may be well asked what right any part of our people has to demand that education give a limited special training to make servants for corporations or small shops. The end of education is not serfdom, even of the most enlightened and agreeable sort, but rather the development of intelligent men and women trained for whatever work they are called upon to undertake. In our schools we are not to produce blind Samsons to labor at the mills.

More than ever before, education is called upon to save children from themselves; for in the enriching of our courses of study temptations to follow false gods have crept in. Now that children in the child-garden and lower schools are trained to strange ideas of work and freedom, and are promoted to our higher schools, teachers find themselves confronted with a new and insidious desire on the part of many students to evade arduous mental labor. These students measure their effectiveness by what they can do — paper-cutting or sled-making — not by their mental capacity. A boy in study hours begs his teacher for some manual work, that he may avoid struggling with a proposition in geometry. He looks forward to a period in the

drawing class or shop, and dreads all purely mental exertion. He is thereby training himself to some purely mechanical art at the expense of his knowledge of men, things, and their relations. Thus he places himself at the mercy of the thinker, the capitalist, let us say, who becomes his master. He must be turned from these pleasing pursuits to the arduous pursuit of truth, that he may be free. And this can be done best by cultivating his intellect with broadening studies.

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